

VZCZCXRO8598
PP RUEHDE RUEHDIR
DE RUEHDO #0606 1581400
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 071400Z JUN 07
FM AMEMBASSY DOHA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6731
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS DOHA 000606

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [QA](#)

SUBJECT: NEW INDICATIONS THAT ELECTIONS WILL TAKE PLACE IN
2008

¶1. (U) The Qatari Amir, Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, issued a decree June 6 which extended the term of the current Advisory Council to June 30, 2008. The term had been set to end June 30 of this year. The Advisory Council consists of 30 members appointed by the Amir; it had been extended, with some changes, on two previous occasions. The announcement was made on Qatari TV and through the Qatar News Agency. On June 7, newspapers reported that the Council of Ministers had approved a draft law governing first-time elections for the legislative body. The two actions, coming together, indicate that elections for 30 of what will be a 45-member body may take place in the first half of 2008.

¶2. (U) The elections law will govern who has the right to run for office and who has the right to vote. It is controversial because, like the country's Nationality Law, it will most likely grant full citizenship rights to only a minority of Qataris who can document a lineage in the country back to ¶1930. The law will be sent back for review to the Advisory Council, which does not sit again until October. It will then come back to the Council of Ministers before going to the Amir for signature.

¶3. (SBU) The Secretary General of the Advisory Council, Fahad al-Khayareen, told Emboff that elections for the Advisory Council would be "a huge project," and the law governing it would face "serious study." He said the approval of the law by the Council of Ministers was a sign that elections are "coming soon."

Comment

¶4. (SBU) Although there has been considerable slippage in expectations regarding the timing of national elections since Qatar's constitution was approved by the citizenry in 2003, it now looks likely that elections will take place in the first half of 2008. A timetable seems to be taking shape involving the approval of the election law in the early part of the year and elections prior to summer holidays. These signs of coming elections will help deflect the criticism of those participants at international conferences in Doha who whispered that Qatar's actions were not in step with its rhetoric and will help meet the expectations of citizens whose appetite for democracy was whetted but who then wondered, will it ever happen?

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